



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Immediate Release: TO PMs OF WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 29, 1943.

Damage caused by rats in the United States this year probably reached the highest figure in history—possibly more than \$200,000,000, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior.

Losses caused by rats in 1943 rose not so much because of larger numbers of the rodents or greater activity on their part, but due to the increased value of farm products and food eaten or damaged.

Even in normal times, rats living on farms occasion an annual loss of at least \$1.00 each and it's believed this figure would be higher now. In towns and cities, the value of material destroyed by rats is probably more than \$2.00 for each rat.

Although it is obviously impossible to count rat noses, experts in rodent control estimate that there are about two rats for every person living on farms. This would mean about 60,000,000 rats on the country's farms. Most farms provide both enough food and harbourage to support large rat populations.

In large cities the rat population has been generally declining for the past quarter of a century, due mainly to rat proof construction, the passing of the horse, improved garbage disposal systems, better control methods and higher public health standards. In smaller towns relatively less concrete is used in construction and garbage removal is sometimes not as effective as in larger communities and the number of rats in such towns is therefore generally higher in proportion to the human population than in larger communities.

In addition to the vast amount of property damage which can be ascribed to rats, they are also a danger to health since the fleas with which they are infested are carriers of bubonic plague and typhus fever. A number of other diseases can also be traced to rats.

The rat is not a native of America. The first rats to come to the New World were the black and Alexandrian rats, natives of Central Europe and Northern Africa, which were brought here via England. These are closely related forms, the Alexandrian being a sub-species of the black rat. These rats probably came over on the ships which brought the first settlers. The brown Norway rat, a large and pugnacious creature, is believed to have been brought to America at about the time of the Revolution. Larger than the black rat, the brown rat established itself quickly and soon drove the black rats further south. Now the Brown rat is found in every State in the union, while the black and Alexandrians are found chiefly in the South and in port cities.